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(1) Media fear new Abe administration; Abe clearly critical of media and cool to media coverage

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Pages 24 and 25) (Abridged slightly)  
September 26, 2006

The new Abe administration is set to move into action. Abe is planning to enhance the functions of the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei). Abe's response to the media deserves attention,

as well. During his tenure as LDP secretary general, Abe harshly criticized television stations as lacking balance. LDP executives' refusal to appear on television programs also created a controversy. But he remains mum when it comes to the question of visiting Yasukuni Shrine. The media, challenged to perform the function of checks and balances, seems to be losing ground to Abe. This article examines the openness of Abe with a sense of self-reflection.

The LDP's stance toward the media, especially television, hardened in September 2003, coinciding with Abe's assumption of office as party secretary general.

First, LDP executives refused to appear on TV-Asahi programs on the day of the November 2003 Lower House election in protest against the station's long report on the main opposition Minshuto's (Democratic Party of Japan) cabinet vision earlier.

This led to a letter in the name of Secretary General Shinzo Abe to the Broadcast and Human Rights/Other Related Rights Committee (BPC) run by the Broadcasting Ethics & Program Improvement Organization (BPO) calling for its deliberations.

In the June 2004 Upper House election, the LDP also sent 200 - 300 letters to media organizations, reading, "There were programs strongly suspected of having violated the spirit of political fairness and equality," apparently alluding to TBS and TV-Asahi programs on the pension programs.

Japan's leading parodist Mad Amano's work posted on Environment Green Political Assembly (Midori no kaigi) head Atsuo Nakamura's website during the election campaigning was also followed by the secretary general's "strong message" that the work be removed from

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the website.

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Abe later became acting secretary-general. In August 2005, the LDP effectively refused the Asahi Shimbun's news coverage on LDP executives except for press conferences on the grounds that the newspaper's data on an NHK program modification case had leaked out. During the September 2005 Lower House election campaigning, the LDP also sent letters to media organizations urging them not to refer the LDP candidates against the postal rebels as "assassins."

"Lawmakers are unnecessarily edgy about the contents of media reports, which is not normal. We fear that such a trend will become stronger under an administration," a midlevel commercial-network worker noted.

This past July, TBS aired an irrelevant photograph of Abe in its news program. This, too, resulted in a stern warning to the broadcaster from the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry.

"In the past, a program reporter would have been called in and asked, 'What was that? Do you have any ill intent? Be sure that you practice more caution from now on.' And that was it," the network worker also said.

The story on LDP executive's refusal to appear on TV-Asahi programs stunned a worker of another broadcaster, who said:

"It sounded like, 'You could become another TV-Asahi.' It certainly served as a threat to other broadcasters, as well. But I don't understand why they immediately resort to legal steps or the BRC instead of offering rebuttals on the media. The Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, which oversees broadcasting, has also changed recently. The ministry often says, 'Turn in a report on a program aired on a certain date. We of course ask why, and the ministry inadvertently says, 'Because there was an query from a certain lawmaker.'"

Meanwhile, Mad Amano, who received the "message" from the LDP, said, "It was more blackmail than a message."

The message read: "The LDP has not approved your modifying our copy. You have clearly defamed Prime Minister Koizumi and the LDP."

In response, Amano sent a letter to then Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe, asking, "I simply intended to correct mistakes in your copy from the standpoint of the general public. What is your view on my action?" Amano has not received any reply from Abe.

How has Abe responded to media coverage on himself?

In 2004, journalist Shunsuke Yamaoka covered a scandal allegedly involving a close relative of Abe. Yamaoka sent inquiries to the Abe office. But an Abe office staffer hung up on him, saying: "People here don't know anything about it."

Yamaoka took this view:

"I haven't received a reply from Mr. Abe. He is the kind of person who only answers questions that are convenient to him and ignores the rest. I have heard similar reactions from other journalists, as well. As a lawmaker, he has not fulfilled his accountability."

It was reported this spring that Abe had sent a congratulatory telegram to a convention of an organization affiliated with the Holy

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Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church).

In the wake of the report, Abe released this statement in June:

"I learned from my local office that it had sent a congratulatory telegram in my personal capacity using the title chief cabinet secretary. The action was misleading, and I told the person in

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charge to exercise caution."

But he has not replied to an open letter from the liaison council of lawyers to prevent the fraudulent sale of goods or services claimed to bring supernatural benefit to the purchaser.

Remains elusive about Yasukuni issue

Abe's posture is hardly open regarding political issues, as well. For instance, it became clear that he had visited Yasukuni Shrine in April this year despite the fact that it was already a political issue in Japan. But he repeatedly insisted: "I have no intention of saying whether or not I had visited the shrine."

Also asked if he would pay homage at the controversial Tokyo shrine once he becomes prime minister, Abe only said: "With the matter escalating into a diplomatic and political issue, I have not intention of declaring my standpoint."

Former LDP Secretary General Koichi Kato's house in Yamagata was set on fire last month. As was Prime Minister Koizumi, it took two weeks for Abe to release this comment: "If it was intended to suppress Mr. Kato's freedom of speech and cause other effects, the act is unforgivable." Abe's summer vacation began on the afternoon of the day the arson incident occurred and he did not regard it as an "emergency case."

It is also eerie to know that persons critical of Abe have suffered from violent attacks, although Abe himself has nothing to do with them. Beside Kato, former Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka, who had lambasted Abe, received threatening calls. Eggs and other objects were also thrown at the nameplate at the gatepost of Tanaka's house.

Lawyer Yoichi Kitamura, a specialist on media lawsuits, explained:

"In 1964, the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of the New York Times. But since then, public figures, like lawmakers, have not been able

to seek compensation of the media except for a case where the media knew that what was reported was false or the media reported a story regardless of its credibility."

Sophia University Media Law Prof. Yasuhiko Tajima also sounds an alarm. Tajima cited the NHK program alteration incident as an example clearly reflecting Abe's posture toward the media.

"Abe may lack the awareness that the media's role is to keep tabs on authority"

Tajima noted:

"Even though Abe himself doesn't mean to apply pressure, saying something about the contents of a program to NHK executives before broadcasting it, that is nothing but outside pressure, objectively speaking. Abe is not aware of that. Abe probably lacks the awareness

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that journalism's role is to keep tabs on authority independent of it."

The next administration has also expressed eagerness for constitutional revision and conspiracy legislation regardless of strong opposition. Tajima added:

"The current administration has tried to capitalize on the media. The next administration might directly intervene in the media finding such incompatible with its wishes."

Tajima also sounded an alarm for the current situation of the media:

"Media organizations that have repeatedly been excluded from media coverage or experienced lawsuits may end up treating reporters coldly. The Asahi Shimbun reporters who had covered the NHK incident and the NHK's whistleblowers were all consequently removed from their posts. The media have become dispirited to some extent."

(2) Abe aiming to strengthen Japan-US alliance with his new interpretation of collective self-defense

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)  
September 23, 2006

Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe will now become Japan's new prime minister in an extraordinary session of the Diet that convenes Sept. 126. In its debate to be kicked off thereafter, the Diet will likely focus on his view of the right of collective self-defense. The government has so far taken the position that Japan has the right to collective self-defense but is not allowed under the Constitution to exercise it. In the meantime, Abe, bearing a stronger Japan-US alliance in mind, has revealed he is thinking of having the government's conventional interpretation altered after taking the reins of government. But there is something vague in his standpoint and there is also something inconsistent with the government's interpretation until now. His view has brought out both welcomes and objections in the government.

"I think we should study this matter, including whether there can be a new interpretation," Abe said in a press conference on Sept. 5, when asked about the right of collective self-defense. With this, Abe implied taking a positive stance to pave the way for Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense by reinterpreting the Constitution even without amending its provisions.

The Japanese government has consistently taken the position that Japan is constitutionally not allowed to exercise its right to collective self-defense. However, the United States wants Japan to change course. In the United States, former Deputy Secretary of State Armitage, who knows Japan well, is one of those who would like Japan to do so. In 2000, Armitage wrote a report before the Bush administration's inauguration. In it, he argued: "Japan's prohibition against collective self-defense is a constraint on alliance cooperation."

Abe probably wanted to answer such expectations. In May last year, Abe, who was then the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's acting secretary general, visited the United States, where he delivered a

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speech. "The government's conventional interpretation has now hit its limit," Abe remarked in his speech there. He added, "One of our generation's responsibilities is to alter the government's

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interpretation and make it possible to exercise that right."

Abe has also hinted at his intention of setting up a study group to reinterpret the Constitution when his administration is launched. Prime Minister Koizumi strengthened the Japan-US alliance by taking forward-looking postures, so it would seem that Abe, too, would like to further solidify the alliance when he comes into office.

(3) Study of Shinzo Abe (Part 3): Economic policy could be new administration's Achilles' heel

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)  
September 23, 2006

House of Representatives member Sanae Takaichi of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) dined with Shinzo Abe in late June.

Takaichi and Abe are allies in such areas as diplomacy and education.

Around that time, an Abe landslide was almost certain. But Takaichi had something on her mind.

It was economic policy. Abe is well versed in foreign affairs/national security, social security, and education, and he has many advisors. He also has a solid vision for the state. When it came to economic policy, though, she had hardly heard about his views.

Abe has come up with a way of ensuring that the unemployed and those whose businesses have failed can get a second chance in society. To do this, it will be necessary to secure new financial resources and eventually undertake fiscal reconstruction, an essential challenge for the Abe government to tackle.

Takaichi told Abe: "A single misstep could result in nothing more than doling out welfare subsidies." In response, Abe replied: "I know, I know. But ..."

Takaichi thought at that time that she was somewhat worried that if Abe only adopted policies to win public favor, the size of the government could swell.

Abe cites "innovation" as the key to Japan's economic growth. The father-in-law of his elder brother, Hironobu, is Jiro Ushio, chairman of Ushio Inc. Ushio repeatedly used this word during meetings of the Council of Economic and Fiscal Policy.

The economic panel served as the engine of the Koizumi administration's structural reforms. After assuming the post of chief cabinet secretary, Abe attended about 30 sessions of the panel.

Looking at the minutes, Abe spoke only 16 times, far less than the roughly 240 statements by State Minister in Charge of Economic and Fiscal Policy Kaoru Yosano and the 180 by Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Heizo Takenaka.

According to an informed source, "In most cases, he read in a flat tone from papers prepared by administrative officials."

In the first half of this year, Yosano and Takenaka locked horns over fiscal reconstruction. At that time, Abe reportedly just

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listened.

Abe had never assumed a portfolio until he became chief cabinet secretary. In addition, he has been elected to the House of

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Representatives only five times. Given this, he has few contacts in government agencies, particularly in economic offices.

Takenaka supported the Koizumi administration's economic policy, but he will leave Nagata-cho when the Abe administration is launched. There are no key advisors to support Abe's economic policy.

It is generally believed that economic policy is Abe's Achilles' heel. Abe is eager to address foreign affairs and national security, but he seems to be less interested in economic matters.

If Abe gives priority to principles or philosophy in working out policies while setting aside discussions on areas that are linked directly to the people's livelihood, his administration might become dominated by ideology.

LDP Lower House member Katsuei Hirasaka, who tutored Abe when he was an elementary school student, said: "He should fully study economic affairs and appoint persons with a sense of balance as his advisors."

(4) Kantei-led policy councils increased to 71, seven of which have never met; Realignment as challenge for new administration

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
September 26, 2006

Jun Tabuse

Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe has proposed establishing a Japanese version of the National Security Council (NSC) as part of his efforts to enhance the functions of the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei). Prime Minister Koizumi also proposed strengthening the Kantei's functions. During his tenure as premier, the number of Kantei-led policy councils, which are viewed as the symbol of the enhanced functions, increased to 71, the largest ever among past administrations. On the other hand, there are evils, too, one of which is that seven of the councils have never met even once. Realigning the councils is likely to be added to the agenda for the new administration.

Of those Kantei-led policy councils, 40 were established by the Koizumi administration in order to deal with emergencies, for example, the Ministerial Council on the Asbestos Issue and the Emergency Anti-Terrorism Headquarters.

The Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) came into being in January 2001 when the Mori administration was in office, but economic management led by the Kantei never occurred before the Koizumi administration came into office. The CEFP met 187 times and shifted the budget compilation initiative from the Ministry of Finance (MOF) to the Kantei. It also demonstrated its ability to break the vested rights and interests held by ministries and agencies, and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Policy Research Council associated with them, and lawmakers working for special interests (zokuguiin).

In the areas in which the prime minister has a strong interest, a number of policy councils were established. One example is the

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Council on Promotion of Food Education, which was established in response to the prime minister's policy speech in January in which he said, "a healthy diet is essential." In the area of tourism, the prime minister appeared on a video promoting tourism and established

the Japan Tourism Advisory Council.

On the other hand, seven councils have never met even once during the five and a half years of the Koizumi administration, such as the Ministerial Council on Public Pension System and the Office of Market Access. The last time the Ministerial Council on Minamata Disease met was in 2000. This council has been retained, for "the government needs to make it clear it attaches importance to Minamata disease," a Secretariat staff member said. There are as many as 33 councils that have met less than three times over the last five years.

A senior official at the Cabinet Secretariat commented: "Aside from councils associated with top priority issues for the administration, some councils were established in a way that overlaps with those ministries or agencies handling the same services. This only leads to terrible inefficiency."

In September 2004, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Sonoda said, "Rationalization is necessary; otherwise, the Kantei's functions will be dispersed instead of enhancement." There were 84 councils in existence at the time, but by the end of that fiscal year, 17 councils that were moribund were removed.

Abe is now trying to enhance the Kantei's functions by establishing a Japanese version of NSC to come under the prime minister's direct control.

Speaking of the way the prime minister exercises his leadership, Keio University Professor of Political Science Yasunori Sone said: "The key is how best to use bureaucrats, politicians, and experts." He cited Britain, which has the same parliamentary cabinet system and where the existing organizations, such as the Foreign Ministry and the National Defense Ministry, concurrently hold posts under the prime minister's direct control to share information. Sone noted, "That could serve as a good reference."

Councils and headquarters that have often met under the Koizumi administration

Times of meetings  
First meeting

Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy  
187  
January 2001

Senior Vice-Ministers' Meeting  
160  
January 2001

Ministerial Council on Monthly Economic Report and Other Relative Issues  
65  
April 1954

Council for Science and Technology Policy  
54  
January 2001

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Security Council  
53  
August 1985

IT Strategic Headquarters  
35  
January 2001

Headquarters for Administrative Reform  
19  
March 2001

Councils and headquarters that have not met under the Koizumi

administration

Conference for Issue of US Military Bases in Okinawa

0

November 1995

Ministerial Council on Public Pension System

0

February 1994

Office of Market Access

0

February 1994

Headquarters for the Promotion of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education

0

March 1996

Office of Government Procurement Review

0

December 1995

Headquarters for Prevention of Inhumane and Violent Acts including Hijacking

0

October 1977

Ministerial Council on Minamata Disease

0

March 1977

(5) Weapons-carrying ships via Japan: Cargoes untouchable under Japanese law

MAINICHI (Page 30) (Full)

September 13, 2006

In western Japan, there is a port with a wire-netted berth for foreign ocean liners with 24-hour monitoring security cameras. This summer, a group of more than 10 officials from the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) got into a rusty foreign cargo ship berthed there. Their on-the-spot inspection of cargoes was carried out in the intervals of loading, and the inspection lasted for several hours.

Foreign cargo ships loaded with weapons, such as antitank guns and shells, have been making frequent port calls in Japan. One of them was loaded with tons of material that can be diverted to make chemical weapons like poison gas. Another ship was loaded with

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cargoes suspected of being missile-related components.

According to public security sources, such cargoes are loaded in Chinese or North Korean ports to be shipped to the Middle East or South Asia. Among the exporters of those cargoes are Chinese companies banned by the US government in its sanctions. However, foreign ships carrying such cargoes do not unload them in Japanese ports. Their cargoes are therefore handled as transit cargoes. These cargoes, though confirmed in inspections, cannot be unearthed. Japanese authorities only report it to their next port of call and other countries.

"Once their cargoes are unloaded, we can take legal action on suspicion of, for example, violating the Swords and Firearms Control Law," says a senior official of the National Police Agency. "But," this official adds, "even if they have cargoes that violate the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law, which prohibits weaponry- and WMD-related shipments, they're untouchable under the Japanese law as long as they're on board and not unloaded."

The cargo ship, which was inspected in the western Japanese port, was on its way to the Middle East with cargoes on board from China. The Japanese authorities, though informed of weapons on board the ship before its entry into port, could not check it out.

In January this year, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and the customs discovered smuggled weapons in a foreign vessel that entered port in Yokohama. Those weapons included 23 pistols, 2 machineguns, about 800 live cartridges, 2 grenades, and 6 hydraulic explosives that are as powerful as dynamite. In this case, police arrested a member of an organized crime group under the wing of Inagawakai, one of Japan's major gangland syndicates, on suspicion of violating the Swords and Firearms Control Law. The police raided that arrested gangster's linked place, where they seized an M-15 submachine gun of the US military and an AK-74 submachine gun of the former Soviet Union.

Those weapons were carried on the foreign freighter that arrived at the off-limits international berth. The gangster and his company entered the berth's restricted area with a pass they had obtained from the Yokohama Customs for "peddling" purposes, and they received those weapons and munitions from crewmen.

This case exemplified Japan's failure to prevent arms from landing in Japan even from ships at international berths under tight security.

"They transfer cargoes to another ship at sea and bring them into Japan," says Katsuhisa Furukawa, chief researcher at the Research Institute of Science and Technology for Society (RISTEX), who once worked for a US research institution studying terrorism. "Terrorists disguising themselves as seafarers could also bring weapons into Japan," Furukawa says. "If they try, they can even use weapons on board their ship," he added.

Last year, a total of 108,179 foreign vessels entered port in Japan. The JCG patrols Japan's territorial waters and conducts rescue services on call. At the same time, the JCG also inspects incoming foreign ships on a routine basis in order to block their crewmen's smuggling of firearms and drugs into Japan and prevent the proliferation of WMD-related materials. Last year, the JCG inspected a total of 11,832 foreign vessels, including its check of transit cargoes in the western Japanese port.

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However, the JCG needs to ask for foreign vessels' voluntary cooperation on its investigations, according to a JCG Guard and Rescue Department official. "We cannot answer anything about our investigations," the official commented. Facts about weapons passing through Japanese ports remain veiled.

(6) Editorial: An incomprehensible proposal on amakudari

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
September 25, 2006

The practice of amakudari or national government employees retiring to cushy positions in companies they previously used to regulate is one issue the new Abe cabinet will take over from the Koizumi cabinet. State Minister in charge of Administrative Reform Koki Chuma recently released a set of proposals for redressing the central government employees' personnel system centering on imposing penalties on illegal influence peddling, while liberalizing in principle the practice of amakudari. Sources involved in the drafting process call the set of proposals the Chuma plan. Chuma has called for the next administration to start working in specific terms, such as revising the personnel system for national government employees.

The National Civil Service Law bans national government employees from landing jobs with profit-making companies for two years after retirement, if those companies are linked with the ministries or agencies they worked for five years until retirement. The revision plan called for the scrapping of this regulation, based on the just cause of lowering the fence between the government and the private sector. However, it is premature to liberalize amakudari practices, because an ex-ante-regulation-type administrative mechanism administered by central government agencies is still in place.

The revisions prohibit retired national government employees from engaging in the following actions: (1) working to persuade companies that have close relations with their pre-retirement duties at their respective ministry or agency to employ them, (2) illegally working on those organizations to which they were assigned before retirement for a certain set period after taking up their new jobs. Just looking at these proposals reveals that the revision proposals have many loopholes. Usually it is not retired officials but personnel officials of each government agency that find companies that accept retired government employees. Ties between government offices and companies that have accepted retired government officials will strengthen if retired government officials go on to work at companies they previously used to regulate. It is possible for government officials who have landed jobs with private companies to work on government offices for which they used to work before retirement not directly but through subordinates.

A proposal for strengthening a monitoring system to ensure the efficacy of the new reemployment rule, another aim of the revision plan, is also questionable. The plan proposes reorganizing the National Public Service Ethics Examination Committee into a monitoring organ, as well as to designate an inspector in an outsider's position for each government agency. No retired government officials would ever openly make an illegal proposition to bureaucrats within government offices. No bureaucrats would ever respond to such a proposition. If the government intends to seriously monitor wrongdoings, a considerable number of personnel and authorization for investigation would be needed. The revision

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plan is far short of specifics to meet such needs.

The revision plan also incorporates a dual-type personnel system of establishing expert posts so that bureaucrats can work until mandatory retiring age. It is better to speed up efforts to revise the personnel system this way. Revising the reemployment rule will only allow rampant amakudari practices. It is necessary to return this revision plan to the drawing board and await reconsideration by the next administration. Measures to encourage amakudari will never be able to obtain understanding from the taxpayers.

SCHIEFFER